THE TALE OF BOBBY BOBOLINK

ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY

TUCK-ME-IN TALES

THE TALE OF BOBBY BOBOLINK

by

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&

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"You Were Mistaken," said Mrs. Bobolink.

Frontispiece

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TALE OF BOBBY BOBOLINK

I

SOMEBODY IS EXPECTED

On May Day the feathered folk in Pleasant Valley began to stop, look and listen. They were expecting somebody.

"Have you seen him?" Rusty Wren asked Jolly Robin.

Jolly Robin said that he hadn't; but he added that he was on the lookout.

"Have you heard his song?" little Mr. Chippy inquired eagerly of Mr. Blackbird.

"No!" that dusky rascal replied. "Not yet! Maybe he isn't coming here this summer." Mr. Blackbird liked to tease little Mr. Chippy. And generally when he tried to, he succeeded.

"Oh! Don't say that!" Mr. Chippy exclaimed. "If I couldn't hear his gay voice I shouldn't care to spend a summer here myself."

Over the meadow, beyond the stone wall where Mr. Chippy made his home in a wild grapevine, Mr. Meadowlark flew to the swampy place where the rushes grew, just to find a Red-winged Blackbird that he knew, in order to learn whether he had seen or heard the friend everybody was watching for.

Perched upon a swaying last year's cattail, Mr. Red-winged Blackbird shook his head in reply. And he said that no doubt it would be a week before the looked-for arrival. "The season's a bit backward,"

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird remarked. "So I don't expect to set eyes on him to-day—though I have known him to get here as early as May Day."

Mr. Meadowlark confessed that he was disappointed.

"It would be a much gayer May Day," he said, "if his rollicking song rang over the meadow."

"What's the matter with your own singing?" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird asked him—meaning that in his opinion Mr. Meadowlark had no reason to be ashamed of his own voice.

"My song is not like his," Mr. Meadowlark answered. And he sighed as he spoke. "To be sure, some people are kind enough to say that my singing is unusually sweet. But you know yourself that there isn't a songster anywhere that can carol so joyfully as Bobby Bobolink."

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird did not dispute that statement. How could he, when the birds were all waiting so eagerly to hear Bobby Bobolink's voice?

"He has a way"—Mr. Meadowlark went on—"a way of making almost any summer's day a gay holiday. He is just bubbling over with happiness; and he can't seem to get his notes out fast enough."

"Yes!" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird chimed in. "He's a cheerful, happy-go-lucky chap. And he wears gay clothes, too."

"What's the matter with your own clothes?" Mr. Meadowlark inquired—meaning that in his opinion Mr. Red-winged Blackbird's black suit, with the shoulders scarlet and buff, was about as striking as anybody could want.

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird was pleased. Anybody could see that. He bowed and spread his wings and tail, and uttered his

well-known call, "Conk-err-ee!" before he made any reply.

"People often compliment me on my taste in colors," he said at last. "And for year-round wear I do think *my* suit is about as good as anybody could ask for. But you know yourself that during the first half of the summer Bobby Bobolink makes a cheerful sight, when his black and white and buff back flashes above the meadow."

And Mr. Meadowlark couldn't deny it; for he knew that it was true.

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II

THE LATEST ARRIVAL

Bobby Bobolink did not reach Pleasant Valley in time to spend May Day with his old friends of the summer before. And although everybody was disappointed not to see him—and hear him—the feathered folk tried to be cheerful and told one another that Bobby ought to arrive almost any day.

"He always finds it hard to leave the rice fields in the South," Mr. Red-winged Blackbird observed with a knowing wink at old Mr. Crow, as the two stopped for a chat on the morning after May Day. "It's rice-planting time in the South,"

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird explained. "Somewhat like corn-planting time here!" And he winked once more.

Although Mr. Crow was in the habit of scratching up Farmer Green's newly-planted corn, just as Bobby Bobolink uncovered the freshly-sown rice in the South, Mr. Crow never cared to have any of his neighbors even hint that he did such a thing. And now he glared at Mr. Red-winged Blackbird, who continued to wink at him.

"Is there something in your eye?" Mr. Crow inquired in his coldest manner.

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird had no wish to make Mr. Crow angry. So he stopped winking at once.

"When you see your friend Bobby Bobolink you'd better tell him to leave the corn strictly alone," Mr. Crow remarked. "Farmer Green expects to begin planting in about three weeks. And he counts on me to watch the field for him. If I catch Bobby

Bobolink there he'll wish he had stayed in the rice fields, down South."

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird smiled. And he told old Mr. Crow not to worry.

"Bobby Bobolink won't touch the corn," he said. "During the first half of the summer he lives on such things as caterpillars and grasshoppers, with a bit of grass-seed now and then."

Old Mr. Crow replied that he was glad to know that.

"He's wise to leave the corn alone," he added. "If Farmer Green was on the lookout for him—with a gun handy—Bobby Bobolink wouldn't act so care-free as he generally does. He wouldn't sing such rollicking songs in the meadow. And now that you've mentioned how he spends his springs in the South, I don't wonder that he appears glad to get to Pleasant Valley. For you may well believe that folks are not so fond of him down there where the rice grows. And unless I'm much mistaken the

planters actually order him out of their fields."

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird told Mr. Crow that he hadn't a doubt that everything Mr. Crow said was so. And he was just about to remark that he should think Mr. Crow must lead a care-free, happy-go-lucky life in winter, in the South, because Farmer Green always stayed in Pleasant Valley the whole year round. But as he opened his bill to speak he heard a sound over in the meadow that made him forget what was on the tip of his tongue.

"Did you hear that song?" he cried. "Hurrah!"

Old Mr. Crow cocked his head on one side and listened. "Yes!" he agreed. "There's no doubt about it. Bobby Bobolink is here at last!"

III

GREETINGS

As fast as they could fly, old Mr. Crow and Mr. Red-winged Blackbird hurried over to the meadow, where they had heard Bobby Bobolink's bubbling notes.

They found him enjoying himself with a lively company of careless bachelors—all distant cousins of Bobby Bobolink—who had travelled with him in a roistering flock all the way from the South.

They were all wonderful singers—those happy Bobolinks. They could scarcely have kept still if they had wanted to. But somehow Bobby Bobolink seemed to be just a bit the best singer of the lot.

Perched on a fence-post, Mr. Meadowlark was drinking in Bobby's merry songs. Jolly Robin had stolen away from the orchard to greet the newcomer and listen to his first concert. And even Rusty Wren had forsaken the cherry tree beside the farmhouse. Although Rusty and his wife were in the midst of putting their summer house to rights, he had not been able to resist telling Mrs. Wren, who did not like to have him away from home, that he must make a short visit in the meadow, "to see a friend."

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird called "Conk-err-ee!" several times to Bobby Bobolink, meaning that he was glad Bobby was back in Pleasant Valley and that he hoped he was in good health, and that Bobby certainly hadn't forgotten how to sing.

As for old Mr. Crow, he winked at Bobby Bobolink and said in a hoarse voice, "I hear they're planting rice down South."

Bobby Bobolink was not like Mr. Crow, who would have flown into a rage had any one made such a remark to him.

"I stayed a while in the rice fields," he answered. "And if I hadn't come away when I did," he added with a laugh, "I'd have been too fat to fly way up here to Pleasant Valley."

Then a torrent of notes came tumbling out of his throat as he darted right over the head of old Mr. Crow (who stood on a hillock) and swerved and zigzagged and wheeled through the air, until Mr. Crow almost tied his neck into a knot, just watching him.

"By the way," Mr. Meadowlark said in an undertone to Mr. Red-winged Blackbird, "our friend Bobby has a different suit from the one he wore when I last saw him."

"When was that?" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird inquired.

"About the middle of last summer!" Mr. Meadowlark explained.

"Ah! This is the second suit he has had since then," said Mr. Red-winged Blackbird. "If you had been with us in the swamp last fall you'd have known that Bobby had a new one then. And here he is now with still another."

Mr. Meadowlark looked a bit troubled.

"I liked the black one—the black one with the white and buff trimmings," he remarked. "It was very becoming to Bobby Bobolink. I was hoping he'd wear one like it this summer."

"Wait!" was Mr. Red-winged Blackbird's mysterious answer. "Wait! And

I promise you won't be disappointed."

"Anyhow, he sings as well as ever," Mr. Meadowlark declared.

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IV

SINGING FOR SOME ONE

The first few days of early May had passed and with them had flitted—somewhere—most of the jolly company in which Bobby Bobolink had journeyed from the South. But a few of those merrymakers had stayed—as Bobby did—in Farmer Green's meadow. They had made up their minds to spend the summer in Pleasant Valley.

Even old Mr. Crow, who was no lover of music, had to admit that he had never heard such bursts of song during all the summers he had spent in the neighborhood. It seemed as if Bobby Bobolink and his companions were trying their best to out-sing one another, though nobody knew why they should do that.

But at last somebody discovered the reason. That rowdy of the woods, Jasper Jay, spied upon the harum-scarum singers one day, when they were all but bursting themselves in a frenzy of song. And he saw that they were giving what Jasper called "a serenade."

They were singing not for themselves but for a dull, yellowish-brown lady of their own sort, who had not arrived from the South until Bobby and his friends had been frolicking about the meadow almost a week.

She seemed a shy creature—this young person—preferring to stay on the ground during the serenade. But Bobby Bobolink and his companions were bold as brass. Often they alighted on the ground near her, as if they thought she could not hear their songs well enough when they skimmed through the air over the grassy meadow. Amid such a jingling and tinkling of notes it was no wonder that the little lady acted somewhat confused.

Jasper Jay, who was almost as great a gossip as Mr. Crow, told everybody in the neighborhood that he had never heard such a hubbub. But then, like his cousin Mr. Crow, Jasper was not a lover of music. And it was true that sprightly Bobby Bobolink and his dashing friends made no attempt to sing together. To be sure, they sang all at the same time; but each one of them sang his own song in his own way, just as if his was the only one that was being sung.

They never tired of entertaining the lady. And whether the yellowish-brown person decided that Bobby Bobolink sang

louder than the others, or whether she thought his singing was sweeter or gayer than that of his friends, nobody ever found out. Perhaps he managed to say something —in his song—that especially pleased her. Anyhow, it was only a short time before Bobby Bobolink was making such remarks as these to everybody in the meadow:

"My wife says I have the quickest eye for a caterpillar that she ever saw!" and "Mrs. Bobolink and I expect to begin to build a new house at once!"

Now, you might think that Bobby's friends, after all their singing for the little lady, would have felt quite glum. But they were not in the least downcast. Of course, Bobby Bobolink would not let them serenade his wife. Indeed he promptly chased them away as soon as he knew that he had won her.

But they were so light-hearted that they started right away to sing for another lady in another part of the meadow.

She was as like the first one as two peas in a pod. And Jasper Jay chuckled when he found out what was going on.

He said he didn't believe they knew the difference.

V

AN INVITATION

Mr. Meadowlark was a great admirer of Bobby Bobolink. Much as he liked to sing himself, he often remained silent when Bobby's joyous music tinkled over the grass-tops in Farmer Green's meadow. And as Mr. Meadowlark was listening to one of Bobby's best songs one day an idea popped suddenly into his head. He liked this notion so well that he flew straight across the meadow to a thicket on the edge of the woods. And there in the undergrowth he found Buddy Brown Thrasher, who was exactly the person he was looking for.

"I've come over to tell you about an idea of mine," Mr. Meadowlark announced. "It's about Bobby Bobolink. You know he has

come back to spend the summer here in Pleasant Valley. It seems to me he's in better voice than ever. And now that he is quite grown up—you know he has a wife—it seems to me that we couldn't do better than invite him to join the Pleasant Valley Singing Society."

Mr. Meadowlark had explained all this in a most eager manner. And he couldn't help being a bit disappointed over the way Buddy Brown Thrasher received it. He did not seem at all excited. To tell the truth, he was a suspicious chap. He never fell in quickly with a new plan, no matter what it might be. And more than once he had made matters somewhat difficult for the Pleasant Valley Singing Society. He was hard to please. Being a very brilliant singer himself, he was never what you might call keen to take in a new member.

When Mr. Meadowlark had told him about his idea Buddy Brown Thrasher gave a sharp whistle, “Whee-u!" That was the only remark he made.

"What's the matter?" Mr. Meadowlark inquired. "Don't you like my scheme?"

"Oh! It's worth looking into, no doubt," Buddy told him. "But I can't say offhand whether it's a good one or not.... Of course Bobby Bobolink would have to pass the test before we take him into the Singing Society."

"If that's all that's troubling you, cheer up!" Mr. Meadowlark cried. "For Bobby Bobolink can pass the singing test as easily as flying."

"I hope so," Buddy Brown Thrasher retorted. "I promise you that I'll be present when Bobby sings before the Society. And if his singing isn't what it ought to be, you can depend on me to know it."

Well, Mr. Meadowlark couldn't object to that. So he told Buddy Brown Thrasher that his promise was fair enough. And then Mr. Meadowlark hurried away to call on other members of the Pleasant Valley

Singing Society and tell them about his plan.

After he had seen and talked with every one, Mr. Meadowlark took it upon himself to go back to the meadow, where he found Bobby Bobolink still singing merrily. And for once Mr. Meadowlark couldn't wait for him to finish. For there was no knowing when Bobby would stop.

"You're invited," said Mr. Meadowlark, "to sing before the Pleasant Valley Singing Society. And if you can pass the test you'll become a member."

Bobby Bobolink was somewhat doubtful as he listened to Mr. Meadowlark's speech.

"I'm afraid it will be difficult," he said.

"Oh, no!" Mr. Meadowlark assured him. "You can pass the test easily enough."

But Bobby Bobolink told him that that wasn't what he meant.

"I'm afraid," he explained, "my wife may not consent!"

VI

MRS. BOBOLINK CONSENTS

It had never occurred to Mr. Meadowlark that Bobby Bobolink's wife might object to her husband's joining the Singing Society. But Bobby seemed doubtful.

"I'll have to ask her," he said. "You see, we're just about to build ourselves a house. And she may think I ought not to belong to any societies at present."

Just then little, yellowish-brown Mrs. Bobolink came skimming over the meadow and dropped down beside them.

"Would you mind, my love, if I joined the Pleasant Valley Singing Society?" Bobby asked her.

"Perhaps you'd like to become a member yourself," Mr. Meadowlark suggested nervously.

But Mrs. Bobolink hastened to say that she wasn't musical. "Of course I enjoy *hearing* songs," she told him; "but I'm not much of a singer myself."

"Your husband is one of the best," Mr. Meadowlark told her hopefully.

"Yes!" she replied. "And sometimes I think he spends almost too much of his time practicing."

"Oh, I can sing and work at the same time," Bobby Bobolink declared. "When we begin work on our new house I shall be singing most of the time."

"How often does your Society meet?" Mrs. Bobolink asked Mr. Meadowlark.

"We have a little sing almost every fine day," he informed her. "But your husband needn't come to every meeting, if

he's too busy. And if necessary he can leave before our sings are finished—except when he takes the test."

"The test!" Mrs. Bobolink echoed. "What's that?"

Mr. Meadowlark explained that before becoming a member everybody had to sing before the Society. "Those that don't sing well enough don't get in," he added. "For instance, there's old Mr. Crow. His voice is too hoarse. So he doesn't belong to the Society."

Well, the moment she heard that, Mrs. Bobolink made up her mind at once.

"My husband can pass any singing test that you can give him!" she exclaimed. "The idea of mentioning him and Mr. Crow in the same breath!"

"Pardon me!" Mr. Meadowlark said hastily. "I took several breaths just before I spoke about Mr. Crow." He hoped that he hadn't offended Bobby Bobolink's wife.

She wasn't really angry. But she was proud of her husband's voice. And she wanted Mr. Meadowlark to know it.

"I wouldn't think of such a thing as not letting Bobby join your Society," she declared. "And as soon as we've finished our new house he can go to every meeting you have, and stay till the end, too."

All this time Bobby Bobolink had been listening anxiously. And when he heard his wife's last remark he was so overjoyed that he sprang into the air and began to sing the happiest song he knew, while he darted back and forth above the heads of his wife and their caller.

"Just listen to him!" Mrs. Bobolink cried, with an air of pride. "Can you beat that?"

Mr. Meadowlark made a modest reply.

He said that in his opinion Bobby Bobolink was the finest singer that had ever come to Pleasant Valley.

And Mrs. Bobolink was so pleased that she confessed she hoped her husband could take his test just as soon as possible.

"He shall take it to-morrow!" Mr. Meadowlark promised.

VII

PASSING THE TEST

The time had come for Bobby Bobolink to sing before the Pleasant Valley Singing Society. Mr. Meadowlark brought Bobby to the meeting, along the rail fence between the meadow and the pasture. And he told everybody that there wasn't really any need of such a test.

"He's by far the finest singer in all these parts," Mr. Meadowlark declared.

There were a few who might have disputed his statement, had not Bobby Bobolink been present. They were too polite, however, to do anything like that. But Mr. Meadowlark himself had a voice of

remarkable sweetness. And many thought that it couldn't be equalled.

"Bobby Bobolink will have to sing for us, just like anybody else, before we make him a member of this Society," Buddy Brown Thrasher cried, after he had given a whistle, "Wheeu!" as if to say that he, for one, doubted Mr. Meadowlark's words. For Buddy Brown Thrasher liked his own singing about as well as any he had ever heard. In the morning, and again at night, he was fond of perching himself on the topmost twig of a tree, where nobody could help seeing him, and singing a song over and over again. It was his favorite song—and the only one he knew. And having practiced it all his life, how he could sing it!

Well, after Buddy Brown Thrasher's remarks there was only one thing to be done. Bobby Bobolink must sing for the

Society. And Mr. Meadowlark turned to him and told him that he might begin at once.

So Bobby alighted on the end of a fence-rail and such a torrent of song burst upon the ears of his listeners as they had never heard before. The notes came tumbling so quickly one upon another that most of the members of the Singing Society began to look bewildered. Bobby Bobolink's singing was almost too fast for even their sharp ears.

He hadn't sung long before somebody interrupted him. Somebody called in a loud voice, "I object!"

It was Buddy Brown Thrasher that spoke. Bobby Bobolink stopped short in the middle of his song. And at once a great clamor arose, when all the other members asked Buddy what he meant.

"I mean," said Buddy Brown Thrasher, as soon as he could make himself heard, "I mean that Bobby Bobolink is playing a trick on us. He has about half a dozen of his friends hidden in the pasture. And they're helping him. They're singing with him."

Everybody was astonished. And as for Bobby Bobolink, he couldn't seem to say a word for himself.

Luckily he didn't need to. For just then his wife came bustling up and settled herself right in the midst of the Singing Society.

Proud as she was of her husband's voice, she hadn't been able to stay away from the meeting. So she had hovered near-by, where she could hear everything without being seen.

"Sir!" she said to Buddy Brown Thrasher. "Kindly point out these hidden friends of my husband!"

Buddy Brown Thrasher looked somewhat uneasy.

“I - I haven't *seen* anybody in the bushes," he stammered.

"Find them!" Mrs. Bobolink ordered. Her manner was so stern that Buddy Brown Thrasher did not dare disobey. He

searched high and low. But he couldn't find a bird anywhere in the pasture.

"You see you were mistaken," Mrs. Bobolink told him severely.

Everybody agreed with her. And then and there they made Bobby Bobolink a member of the Pleasant Valley Singing Society. There was no doubt that he had sung his song without a bit of help.

"It was wonderful!" everybody exclaimed—everybody but Buddy Brown Thrasher. He muttered that it was no

wonder he made a mistake, for he didn't know the song himself. And he said it was much too fast for his taste.

VIII

THE HOUSE IN THE MEADOW

Bobby Bobolink and his wife had talked a good deal about the home they were going to have.

And unlike some people, who are forever planning things but never begin the actual doing of them, they soon set to work to build their nest.

First, of course, they had to find a pleasant place for it. So they looked the ground over carefully. Bobby Bobolink favored the exact center of the big meadow building site, for he said that if Johnnie Green ever came into the meadow he was more likely to take a short cut across a corner of it than he was to walk straight through the middle.

"You may not know," he said to his wife, "that Farmer Green doesn't care to have the grass on the farm trampled down."

But Mrs. Bobolink replied that there were other things to think of. She said that she liked to live in a rather moist place—that such a spot was comfortable in hot weather. And furthermore she wanted to be near water. "If you need a drink on a warm day it's not always convenient to go far out of your way for it," she pointed out.

Well, Bobby Bobolink saw at once that Mrs. Bobolink had made up her mind, and there was no use trying to change it. Besides, he wanted to please her.

"Then, my dear, where would you like to have our house built?" he asked.

"I should prefer to settle in the lower end of the meadow, near Cedar Swamp," she replied. "The ground thereabouts is just damp enough to suit me. And there's always plenty of water to drink in the swamp.... Besides," she added, "it's

somewhat marshy in that part of the meadow.

"And you won't find Johnny Green trespassing down there. He might get his feet wet!"

Bobby Bobolink turned his head away so that his wife wouldn't notice the smile that flitted across his face. He saw that Mrs. Bobolink didn't know Johnnie Green very well.

In summer Johnnie almost always went barefooted. And he never minded getting his feet wet any more than Paddy Muskrat did.

But if his wife wanted their nest

near the swamp, Bobby Bobolink was willing to oblige her.

"Very well!" he said. "Let's go down there now and look for the best place to build."

So off they flew. And after a careful search they discovered a snug little hollow in the ground that entirely suited them both.

Since the spot was somewhat moist, early in the season as it was the grass grew thick and high all around, making a fine screen to prevent prying eyes from seeing what was to be hidden there.

Having decided on their building site, Bobby Bobolink and his wife began to gather weed stems, leaves and coarse grasses, all left over from the year before and dried by the spring sunshine. Those served for the outside of the nest. As for the inside, they lined that with soft,fine grasses, because they expected to keep something precious in that nest before a great while.

IX

JOHNNIE GREEN INTRUDES

Bobby Bobolink and his wife had finished their new nest.

"There!" Mrs. Bobolink exclaimed, as she gave the lining of soft grasses a final pat. "There's not another thing to be done to it."

"It's perfect!" Bobby told her. "But I think I can make one slight improvement, for we mustn't forget Henry Hawk." And while his wife looked on somewhat anxiously he bent a few grass stalks over so that they completely hid the nest from anybody passing overhead.

"Henry Hawk will never spy our nest now," Bobby remarked a few minutes later, as he

flew back and forth over the spot and tried in vain to catch a glimpse of their new home. "If I can't see it as near as I am, Henry Hawk will never find it as he sails high above the meadow, for all his eyes are terribly sharp."

Mrs. Bobolink then told her husband that his improvement was a fine one. And Bobby was so well pleased that he sang a song for his wife, while she rested from her labors.

After that they flew off and told all their friends that their new home was built. But they didn't invite anybody to a house-warming, for that was not their way. They never so much as told people where their house was hidden. They were afraid that some gossip might drop a hint to old Mr. Crow, or his noisy cousin, Jasper Jay, or perhaps Mr. Blackbird. And later there would be something in the nest that would have made a dainty meal for any one of those rascals. No! Mr. and Mrs. Bobolink did not intend to have their nest robbed of its treasure—not if they could help it!

Now, it was only a short time later that Bobby Bobolink and his wife shared a wonderful secret. Five grayish-white eggs, each quite pointed at one end, lay in their nest. And nobody but themselves was a bit the wiser.

To be sure, the neighbors remarked that Bobby Bobolink was simply bursting with song. He was more musical than ever. But they never dreamed what it was that could make him even happier than he had always been.

At last there came a time when Bobby—though he was just as happy—seemed to have less leisure for singing. And then it was easy for the neighbors to guess the reason for that, because it was plain that the Bobolink family was not gathering great numbers of grasshoppers and caterpillars merely for the fun of it.

Hidden as the little Bobolinks were in the tall grass, no stranger found them. Of course, Mrs. Bobolink went to some trouble to keep the secret of her nest in the

family. Whenever she left her home she moved along the ground a little way before rising into view. And when she returned she alighted some distance off and scurried through the grass until she reached home.

By taking such pains she kept others from knowing exactly where her nest was. And nothing had happened to alarm her until one day she caught sight of Johnnie Green. He had come into the meadow to hunt for strawberries. And to Mrs. Bobolink's dismay he was headed straight for her house.

X

FOOLING JOHNNIE GREEN

When Mrs. Bobolink saw Johnnie Green, carrying a tin pail, come walking through the meadow straight towards her house she was terribly frightened. She was not afraid for herself. Her only thought was of her children, who were still too young to leave the nest.

Somehow Mrs. Bobolink felt sure that Johnnie was searching for her nest, for he had his head bent toward the ground, as if he were looking for something. And that bright tin pail! Mrs. Bobolink viewed it with alarm. She just knew that it was meant to carry off her children!

Of course Johnnie Green was only looking for strawberries. But Mrs. Bobolink didn't

know that. All at once she remembered how she had objected to having her nest in the very center of the meadow, although her husband had told her that he thought it the safest place. And it came back to her, too, how she had said that Johnnie Green would never come into the lower end of the meadow, near Cedar Swamp, for fear of getting his feet wet.

Poor Mrs. Bobolink choked as she thought how foolish she had been. But it was too late to move now. And she didn't see what she was going to do. She wished Bobby was at home, though she had no idea how he could have headed off Johnnie Green who was fast drawing nearer.

As soon as she could speak she called "Chenk, chenk!" at the top of her voice.

She could think of nothing else to say.

Luckily Bobby was not far away. And hearing his wife's alarm call, he turned to hurry home. But seeing Johnnie Green, he

swerved sharply aside and dropped down upon a tuft of grass not too near the nest.

And then Bobby Bobolink made a great fuss. He cried "Chink, chink!" over and over again, now fluttering into the grass, now bobbing into sight again. Johnnie Green couldn't help noticing him.

"There must be a nest there!" he exclaimed under his breath. And he ran quickly to the spot where Bobby was acting so queerly. But when he got there Johnnie found nothing.

Bobby Bobolink had fooled him. He never knew how near he came to stumbling upon the nest, before Bobby played that trick on him.

Mrs. Bobolink was greatly relieved when Johnnie Green left her end of the meadow. And she told her husband that she had never supposed Johnnie would come where it was so damp, for fear of getting his feet wet.

Bobby Bobolink did not tell her that he had known all the time that a little water never troubled Johnnie Green—so long as he didn't have to wash his face in it.

XI

BOBBY'S NAMES

Everybody—almost—liked Bobby Bobolink. His neighbors in Farmer Green's meadow enjoyed his singing. And they thought him the merriest harum-scarum they had ever known. He was even cheerful to look at, too. For with every bright day that passed, Bobby Bobolink's dress took on a gayer hue. The truth was that the yellowish tips of his feathers were wearing away, leaving him a handsome suit of black, set off by a generous patch of creamy yellow on the back of his neck, with enough white on his back and shoulders to make a most jaunty costume.

Most of the field people enjoyed Bobby Bobolink's company, for he was always in high spirits. And many of them were vain

enough to like to be seen with him, on account of his dashing appearance. Mr. Red-winged Blackbird was especially fond of Bobby's companionship. And he was forever speaking of his old friend, Bobby Bobolink, and acting as if he knew Bobby a great deal better than anybody else did.

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird never tired of telling the neighbors about the good times he and Bobby had together when they were in the South. And he related many things about Bobby that some of the feathered folk hadn't heard of.

"There isn't anybody in the valley that has more names than Bobby Bobolink," Mr. Red-winged Blackbird said to Mr. Crow one day. "Some people call him the Reed Bird. And down South they scarcely know the name Bobolink. Down there everybody calls him the Rice Bird. And there's an island far off in the southern seas where people speak of him as the Butter Bird."

Now, if the truth must be known, old Mr. Crow was a bit jealous of Bobby Bobolink.

It was said—by those that ought to have known—that Mr. Crow didn't like it because Bobby Bobolink was not only a member of the Pleasant Valley Singing Society, but its finest singer as well. Unfortunately, Mr. Crow's husky voice had always prevented his joining the Society. And somehow—having heard that Bobby was very fond of rice—Mr. Crow could not get the notion out of his head that he might be just as fond of corn.

If Mr. Crow thought anybody but himself liked corn he was sure to be spiteful towards him. You might have thought, from the way Mr. Crow acted, that Farmer Green didn't raise enough corn to go around.

"How does it happen," Mr. Crow inquired slyly of Mr. Red-winged Blackbird, "that your friend Bobby Bobolink has all these names? It can't be—can it—that he is a rogue and is always changing his name so people won't know who he is?"

"Certainly not!" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird snapped. "Only a stupid person would ask such a question as that."

Just then Bobby Bobolink himself flashed across the meadow and joined them. And Mr. Red-winged Blackbird began to talk about the weather.

He was afraid that Mr. Crow intended to be disagreeable.

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XII

MR. CROW IS DISAGREEABLE

Although Mr. Red-winged Blackbird talked about the weather as fast as he could, his chatter did not prevent Mr. Crow from interrupting him, because the old gentleman was determined to be disagreeable to Bobby Bobolink, and nothing could stop him.

"Your friend here has been talking about you," he told Bobby Bobolink with a wise smile. "He says you have a good many names."

"Yes!" Bobby told Mr. Crow. "That's quite true."

Mr. Crow coughed; and he shot a side long look at Mr. Red-winged Blackbird.

"It must be pleasant to have so many fine names," Mr. Crow then added, with a smirk.

"Oh, very!" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird answered for his friend.

Mr. Crow turned a snapping eye on him, and croaked:

"There's at least one name you left out among the lot you mentioned to me. You said he was known as the Reed Bird, the Rice Bird, and the Butter Bird. But there's one more bird still to be added to the list."

"Is there?"

"Yes!" Mr. Crow replied. "Maybe I know more about your chum than you do. Perhaps you weren't aware that in spite of all the elegant names you've spoken of, he's nothing but a Skunk Blackbird after all!" And with a loud haw-haw Mr. Crow rose upon the breeze and flapped into the woods. That was a favorite trick of his. After making some specially rude remark

he would hurry away before anybody had time to think of a retort.

"The idea!" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird exclaimed to Bobby Bobolink, gazing after Mr. Crow with an injured air. "He insulted you!"

To his great surprise Bobby laughed heartily.

"Mr. Crow is a wise old bird," he said, "He generally knows what he's talking about."

"You don't mean to say that he was telling the truth, do you?" Mr. Red-winged Blackbird demanded.

"I do!" Bobby Bobolink admitted.

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird edged away slightly. Skunks, he knew, would rather eat a bird than not. And he couldn't help

wondering whether a Skunk Blackbird might be as dangerous.

"Then some people do call you that!" he faltered.

"Yes! But I don't care," Bobby Bobolink answered carelessly. "It's only because of these clothes I'm wearing at present—black, you know, with stripes of white down each side and meeting on my back."

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird stared at him.

"Then," he asked, "that's the only way you're like a Skunk?"

"Certainly!" said Bobby. And he laughed so merrily that Mr. Red-winged Blackbird had to believe him.

"I was scared, for a moment," he confessed. "I was afraid you might take it into your head to eat me."

Bobby Bobolink seemed to think that a huge joke. And he sang several humorous songs before he turned to Mr. Red-winged Blackbird and said:

"I can tell you one thing. I'd rather be called a Skunk Blackbird than a Skunk Crow, any day!"

XIII

MR. CATBIRD'S TRICK

In a clump of lilac bushes near Farmer Green's garden Mr. Catbird made his home. He was an odd fellow, very friendly toward everybody in the farmhouse, except the cat, whom he dearly loved to tease. When she passed through the garden on her way to the meadow to hunt for mice, Mr. Catbird was quite likely to begin mewing. It always made Miss Kitty furious to be mocked. And sometimes she crept into the bushes herself, hoping to surprise Mr. Catbird and teach him a lesson. But she never caught him.

Now, the cat was not the only one whose calls Mr. Catbird imitated. Although he liked almost all his bird neighbors and was especially kind and helpful when they were

in trouble, nothing pleased him more than to sing their songs. Knowing as they did that he was always ready to feed any nestlings that were left to fend for themselves, and that he was quick to help any of the small feathered folk to fight an enemy, his neighbors did not care how much Mr. Catbird mocked them. It was only his way of having fun; so they didn't mind.

Mr. Catbird was always prankish and full of spirits. And feeling all ready for a lark one morning and not knowing what else to do, he decided to visit the meadow and play a trick on Bobby Bobolink and his wife.

So when the Bobolinks were away from home on a short trip Mr. Catbird flew to their end of the meadow and hid in a bush not far from the spot where they had built their nest on the ground.

From his hiding place Mr. Catbird watched closely. And soon he saw Mrs. Bobolink, followed shortly by her husband, come

skimming across the meadow and settle down in the grass.

Well, Mr. Catbird was so delighted with the trick he was about to play on them that first he spread his feathers, and then he tucked them close about his slim body, while he bobbed about on the branch where he sat, giving his tail a flirt now and then as if he were so amused that he simply couldn't keep still.

After spending some minutes in that fashion Mr. Catbird peeped out of his bush again and began what he expected would be a perfect imitation of one of Bobby Bobolink's songs. But somehow there seemed to be something wrong. They were very strange notes that he uttered. And the moment she heard them Mrs. Bobolink said aloud to her husband, "What in the world is that queer call? I never heard anything like it in all my days!"

Bobby Bobolink couldn't tell her. And since they had no idea who was lurking near their home nor exactly where he was, they

kept quite still, hidden as they were by the tall grasses.

Mr. Catbird had heard what they said. And he was slightly upset, for he had intended that they should think there was a strange Bobolink in the meadow.

"I'll have to try again," he said to himself. "Next time I'll do better."

XIV

FRIGHTENING MRS. BOBOLINK

Not knowing who gave the strange cry near their home, Bobby Bobolink and his wife held their breaths and waited. They never dreamed that it was their good friend, Mr. Catbird, hidden in a bush near-by, who was trying to imitate one of Bobby's songs.

Meanwhile that fun-loving fellow smiled broadly to himself. And giving his tail an upward toss he opened his mouth once more, only to give voice to one of the oddest sounds that was ever heard in Pleasant Valley.

Mr. Catbird knew right away that he hadn't caught the trick of mocking Bobby Bobolink. So he stopped short.

"I wonder what's the matter with me," he murmured. "Can it be that I've caught a cold and didn't know it?"

He cleared his throat and made ready to attempt Bobby Bobolink's song once more. But he waited a moment, for he could hear Bobby talking to his wife.

"Don't be alarmed!" he was saying. "It sounded to me as if somebody had a frog in his throat."

"I hope you're not mistaken," was Mrs. Bobolink's somewhat doubting answer.

"I thought I heard him choke a moment ago," Bobby told her. "We'll keep still until we know where the noise comes from."

Mr. Catbird winced. He was not used to hearing anybody speak of his singing as "noise." And he made up his mind

that he would sing a song in Bobby Bobolink's best manner. So again he opened his mouth.

He hadn't sung half a dozen notes before Bobby Bobolink's wife gave a shrill scream.

"Oh, dear!" she cried. "That's a terrible noise. It hurts my ears to hear it."

Mr. Catbird had stopped when Mrs. Bobolink screamed. A puzzled look came over his face.

"I don't see what's the matter with me today," he said under his breath. "This is the first time I ever tried to mock anybody and made such a bungle of it.... Perhaps I'm trying to sing too fast," he added. "So I'll sing slower next time."

But his slow notes were queerer still. Though he tried to make them rollicking and merry, he succeeded only in giving a number of doleful whines.

"That won't do!" he exclaimed. "I declare, I haven't caught the trick yet." And to his great distress he heard Mrs. Bobolink weeping.

Now, Mr. Catbird had only wanted to have a jolly time with the Bobolink family. He had intended to sing one of Bobby's songs a few times, until they were puzzled; and then he had expected to dash out of the bush where he was hiding and have a good laugh with Mr. and Mrs. Bobolink. But somehow his plans were turning out all wrong.

"What shall I do?" Mr. Catbird groaned. "Here I've gone and frightened Bobby Bobolink's wife! Something's the matter with my voice. And I don't dare to try another song for fear she'll fall into a faint."

Then an idea flashed into his head. "If she knows who's hiding in this bush Mrs. Bobolink won't be frightened!" And thereupon he mewed almost exactly like Farmer Green's cat. But the sound was just different enough for Bobby Bobolink to know at once who made it.

"It's all right!" he told his wife merrily. "Don't worry! Mr. Catbird is hiding somewhere. He has been teasing us!"

Then Mr. Catbird came out of the bush and apologized like the gentleman he was.

"I didn't mean to frighten Mrs. Bobolink," he explained. "I was only trying to mock you. But there's something wrong with my voice. I think I'll have to go and see Aunt Polly Woodchuck, the herb doctor."

Bobby Bobolink only laughed harder than ever.

"There's nothing the matter with you!" he cried. "There isn't anybody that can imitate my songs—unless it's one of the

Bobolink family. I sing too fast for you—that's the trouble."

Well, Mr. Catbird looked vastly relieved.

"I'm glad to know that," he said. "And I'll never try to mock you again."

"I should hope not!" Mrs. Bobolink told him. "For I never heard such a frightful noise in all my days."

XV

HAYING TIME

By the time the Bobolink youngsters were beginning to learn to fly Mrs. Bobolink noticed something about her husband that caused her some uneasiness. Bobby Bobolink was unusually jolly. And since his wife didn't know of anything to make him feel happier than he had always been, she couldn't help worrying for fear something was troubling him. For Bobby Bobolink almost never let anything dash his high spirits. He often said that there was nothing so uplifting as a rousing song—unless it was a good pair of wings!

Mrs. Bobolink thought and thought. But so far as she could see everything was going smoothly. Already the children gave

promise of becoming fine fliers, taking as naturally to the air as ducks to water. And it was a great year for grasshoppers; so Bobby Bobolink couldn't be worrying about a scarcity of food.

Bobby's wife thought of this, that and the other thing. But she could hit on nothing that wasn't exactly as it should be. So at last she decided to ask her husband what it was that was troubling him and making him so remarkably cheerful.

"I don't like to upset you, my dear," he said in response to her question. "But I may as well tell you that we ought to move at the earliest possible moment."

"Move!" she cried. "Oh, no! I don't want to move. I'm quite contented with this house. It's in just the place I like."

"I'm sorry," said Bobby. "But we shall have to move all the same. And when I tell you why, I think you'll agree with me that the sooner we move the better it will be for us."

Little Mrs. Bobolink replied very firmly that she would have to hear a good reason before she would consent to move an inch.

So Bobby told her. "Haying time has come!"

"What of that?" his wife inquired. "Farmer Green doesn't expect us to help him, does he?"

"Oh, no!" Bobby answered with a short laugh. "But he'll cut the grass all over the meadow. And even if our children should escape with their lives, there's still Henry Hawk to think of. He could see them easily enough, with the grass all gone from above the nest."

That was reason enough for Mrs. Bobolink. She wanted to move right away. But there was something to prevent that.

"We certainly can't leave here till the children have learned to fly better than they do now," she said. "But as soon as they can handle themselves well enough we'll

go. We'll know—won't we—when Farmer Green begins to mow?"

"Indeed we will!" Bobby cried. "The mowing-machine makes a terrible clatter. And we'll have to quit the neighborhood in a hurry when we hear it, for it moves fast, and cuts the grass down like fire."

Mrs. Bobolink was all a-flutter. And she spent so much time teaching her children to fly that they learned surprisingly fast. By the time an odd *clackety-clack* sounded across the meadow early one fine morning the Bobolink family was all ready to move.

Mrs. Bobolink was gathering her children hastily about her when Bobby came hurrying back from a trip to the farm buildings. He had seen—as well as heard—the mowing-machine. And he knew there was no time to waste.

"Are you ready?" he called as he fluttered quickly down beside his family.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Bobolink.

"You haven't forgotten anything?"

She counted her children carefully before answering.

"No!" she said. "There are five of them here." And then, a look of dismay came over her face.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "I've forgotten to pick out a place to move to!"

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XVI

MR. FROG IS AMUSED

With the clatter of the mowing-machine growing louder every moment, Bobby Bobolink didn't stop to ask his wife to what place she would like to move.

"Follow me!" he cried. And rising quickly he headed for Cedar Swamp, with Mrs. Bobolink and their five children trailing after him.

It was the quickest move you ever saw—if you had only seen it! In a few minutes they were settled in the swamp. And to Bobby Bobolink's relief his wife declared that she liked their new home, because it was in a good damp place and there was plenty of good water to drink.

After moving to Cedar Swamp Bobby Bobolink often met a spry gentleman who lived there. His name was Ferdinand Frog. And being a tailor, he always took special notice of everybody's clothes. For himself Mr. Frog preferred a dark green suit, somewhat spotted, and a white waistcoat. And since he spent a great deal of his time in the water, his white waistcoat always looked very spick-and-span. Yes! Ferdinand Frog was an elegant person. And being somewhat shallow-brained, he was rather vain of his appearance, and was likely to snicker at other people if their clothes seemed to him the least bit odd.

Now, Bobby Bobolink had noticed from the first that whenever he met Mr. Frog he began to titter. But since Bobby was always ready with a laugh himself, he supposed that Mr. Ferdinand Frog was merely bubbling over with good spirits. So he used to pass the time of day with the gay tailor and maybe sing a jolly song for him.

And all the while Mr. Frog would grin widely and giggle.

At last Bobby Bobolink noticed that Mr. Frog's bulging eyes were always looking him up and down, from head to feet. And before long it dawned on Bobby Bobolink that the tailor was not laughing *with* him.

No! There was no doubt that Ferdinand Frog was laughing *at* him. And there is a great difference between these two kinds of laughter.

All at once Bobby Bobolink began to feel uncomfortable. And though he had intended to sing another song for Mr. Frog, he did not do it. Instead he said a hasty good-day and hurried home to his wife.

"My dear," Bobby said to Mrs. Bobolink in an anxious voice, "do you see anything queer about my appearance?"

She looked him over carefully.

"Why, no!" she answered at last. "Why do you ask me such an odd question?"

"Well," said Bobby, "Mr. Frog, the tailor, is always staring at me in the oddest fashion

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Mr. Frog Laughed at Bobby Bobolink

and snickering as if he saw something that amused him."

"Don't worry about that simpleton!" Mrs. Bobolink cried. "You look a great deal better than he does. And as for your voices, there's really no comparison. Yours is one of the finest in Pleasant Valley; but Ferdinand Frog's is nothing but a croak. It's even worse than old Mr. Crow's!"

After that Bobby Bobolink felt better. He knew that his wife was particular. And if she said he looked all right then he was sure he could have no cause to be uneasy.

"It must be only Mr. Frog's queer eyes," he said to Mrs. Bobolink. "I've been thinking that he saw something strange about me. But I must be mistaken."

Nevertheless, the very next time Bobby met Mr. Frog the tailor burst out laughing, right in his face. And again his eyes rolled from Bobby's head to his feet, and back again, in a most unpleasant leer.

"What on earth do you see to laugh at?" Bobby Bobolink demanded.

"Tee-hee!" Mr. Frog giggled. "Don't you know?"

"No, I don't!" Bobby snapped.

"It's your clothes!" Mr. Frog told him. "You've got them on upside down!"

XVII

TURNING THE TABLES

Mr. Frog had given Bobby Bobolink a great surprise. He had said that Bobby was wearing his clothes upside down.

After making that unpleasant remark Mr. Frog burst into a gale of laughter. And it was some time before he could say anything more. While he held his sides and laughed, Bobby Bobolink tried to look at his own reflection in a pool of water. But so far as he could see there was nothing unusual about his suit. He was puzzled; but there was no use asking Mr. Frog any questions just then Bobby knew that he would have to wait until the silly tailor's fit of laughing had passed.

At last Mr. Frog grew calmer. He drew forth a big handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped his eyes.

"You're certainly the funniest sight I've ever seen!" he exclaimed.

"I wish you'd explain about my suit being upside down," Bobby said. "I've worn it this way for almost two months. And only yesterday my wife told me there was nothing wrong with it."

"Ah!" Mr. Frog cried. "She doesn't know about the styles. If she did, she'd know what was the matter. Your waistcoat is black; and you wear bright colors on your back. Anybody that follows the fashions as I do could tell you that your coat should be black, and that the yellow and white ought to be on your waistcoat. That's one of the rules: Coat dark, waistcoat bright and gay! Look at me!" And Mr. Frog drew himself up proudly and leaned against a stump, with his feet crossed, exactly as if he was having his picture taken.

Bobby Bobolink looked at him. And all at once he burst out laughing.

Now it was Mr. Frog's turn to feel uncomfortable.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Isn't my tie straight?"

"Oh, I dare say your tie's correct," Bobby Bobolink told him. "But there's something queer about you. Maybe it's because your feet are so big!" And he laughed harder than ever; for Mr. Frog certainly looked funny.

Now, Mr. Frog's feet were a great trial to him. He had always wanted small ones. But somehow he had never been able to change them.

"They aren't really as big as they look," he remarked, gazing down at his feet mournfully. "You see, trousers are being worn very tight this summer. And that always makes the feet seem bigger.... My feet can't look peculiar."

"Then," said Bobby Bobolink, "it must be something else that amuses me. It must be your mouth!"

"My mouth!" Mr. Frog repeated, as his jaw dropped. "What's the matter with that?"

"It's so big!" Bobby cried.

Now, Mr. Frog had always been terribly sensitive about the size of his mouth.

"I'll tell you something about my mouth," he said. "Once it was smaller than yours. But I've smiled so much it has stretched a bit, though I hoped nobody had noticed that."

"Well," Bobby Bobolink told him, "I'm better off than you are, Mr. Frog. For I expect to have a new suit this fall. But how are you going to change your mouth—or your feet, either?"

That was a question that Mr. Frog couldn't answer. He made no attempt to reply, but plunged into the water and swam away.

And he never again laughed at anybody's clothes all that summer.

XVIII

TIMOTHY TURTLE'S COMPLAINT

It happened that the Bobolink family moved to Cedar Swamp just when Timothy Turtle had arrived there for a short outing. It was Mr. Turtle's custom to leave his home in Black Creek now and than and spend a few days in some other neighborhood. He said that after living in the creek as many years as he had it did him good to get a change once in a while. About every forty years he paid a visit to the Beaver Pond on the other side of Blue Mountain. But he visited Cedar Swamp oftener than that, because it was nearer his home.

There was scarcely anybody that was glad to see Mr. Turtle. He was a snappish, surly old chap. And he was forever finding fault

with everybody and everything. It seemed as if you couldn't please him, no matter how much you tried. He had spent less than a week in Cedar Swamp before every one voted him a nuisance. And he had invitations, daily, to go back where he came from.

But Timothy Turtle announced in no uncertain tones that he wouldn't go till he was ready. He said that it was a waste of breath to urge him to leave, and that those that didn't care for his company might move. He promised that he wouldn't stop anybody—unless he happened to get hold of him!

Naturally every one took pains to keep out of Timothy Turtle's reach. It was well known that when his powerful jaws closed upon a person's leg, for instance, its unlucky owner might as well not try to get away till Timothy was ready to let him go. And if it happened to be his head that Timothy Turtle seized well, then he was unluckier still!

If Timothy Turtle was grumpy before Bobby Bobolink moved to Cedar Swamp, it would be hard to say what he was afterward. For Bobby Bobolink's happy songs drove Timothy Turtle almost crazy. He said that if he had known he would have to listen to such merry singing he would have taken his outing in the Beaver Pond, though he wasn't really due there for thirty-nine years, because he had visited the Beaver colony only the summer before.

When Timothy heard Bobby Bobolink's song ringing through the swamp he hurried as fast as he could toward the place

where it seemed to come from. Timothy did that, not because he wanted to hear the singing better, but because he had something to say to the singer. He wanted to tell him to keep still. And he had a good many disagreeable remarks on the tip of his tongue, all ready to fling at Bobby Bobolink.

But somehow Mr. Turtle never succeeded in finding Bobby. After Mr. Turtle had

swum in one direction he was sure to hear the song in another. Sometimes he would even leave the water and crawl over the soggy, boggy turf; and that was slow work for Timothy Turtle. You may be sure it did not improve his temper to find that his journeying had been all in vain.

It happened that at last somebody told Bobby Bobolink that Mr. Turtle wanted to speak to him. And being most obliging, Bobby set out to find Timothy. "It's a shame," he said, "to disappoint an old gentleman."

Anybody could tell, from that remark, that he didn't know Timothy Turtle.

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"Good Morning, Mr. Turtle," Bobby Cried.

XIX

BOBBY'S MISTAKE

After a good deal of searching Bobby Bobolink discovered Timothy Turtle in a pool in Cedar Swamp, sunning himself on an old stump that was half under water.

"Good morning, Mr. Turtle!" Bobby cried. "Is it true that you have something to say to me?"

And feeling quite happy and care-free, Bobby began to sing one of his most sprightly songs. For Mr. Turtle was a slow old fellow. It took him some time to answer a question, especially when he was dozing.

But the moment Bobby Bobolink began to sing old Mr. Timothy Turtle came to life

instantly. And he was so angry at hearing that rollicking song that much as he wanted to, he couldn't speak. Somehow the words seemed to stick in his throat.

And for a few moments Timothy was afraid he was going to choke.

Now Bobby Bobolink was such a lively person that he couldn't keep still long. Especially when he was singing he liked to be on the move. So when he saw that Timothy Turtle wasn't going to speak immediately Bobby leaped from the bush where he was perched and began flying joyously over the swamp.

All the time he sang with all his might, making so much music that he could not hear Timothy Turtle calling to him at last.

Once in a while Bobby wheeled above Mr. Turtle, so that the old fellow might enjoy his best notes. He little knew that Mr. Turtle was crying to him to stop, for goodness' sake! And noticing that

Timothy's mouth was moving, Bobby Bobolink said to himself:

"He looks terribly fierce; but of course he's only commanding me not to stop singing."

It was no wonder that Bobby Bobolink thought as he did, because his neighbors were always begging him to sing something for them.

"It must be that Mr. Turtle wanted to see me so he could ask me to sing some songs for him," Bobby thought. And wishing to please Timothy Turtle, Bobby Bobolink sang as he hadn't sung all summer long.

At last Timothy Turtle felt that he couldn't bear to hear another note. And flopping off the stump, he splashed into the water and sank to the bottom of the swamp, where he buried his head in the mud.

And there he stayed until he dared hope that Bobby Bobolink had stopped singing, or gone away to a distant part of the

country.

"Has anybody seen Timothy Turtle?" Bobby Bobolink kept calling as soon as he noticed that Mr. Turtle had vanished. But no one knew where the old fellow was. And at last Bobby gave up looking for him. But he thought it strange that Timothy hadn't waited to hear the rest of his song.

"I hope he isn't ill," Bobby told his friends.

But they only laughed.

"Timothy Turtle is altogether too old and tough to have much the matter with him," they said. "If he's ill, it's nothing but ill temper."

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XX

A HERMIT'S ADVICE

There was another, besides Timothy Turtle, who was not pleased when Bobby Bobolink moved to Cedar Swamp at haying time. But this was a very different sort of person. It was Jolly Robin's cousin, Mr. Hermit Thrush. Everybody called him "the Hermit" for short, because he was a quiet gentleman, who did not like to attract attention, but preferred to spend his time in a thicket on the edge of the swamp. He had a beautiful, sweet song, which he sang in a calm, unruffled fashion when he thought nobody was near.

The Hermit loathed noisy, boisterous people. And he disliked loud clothes, too—no matter who wore them. He had even

been known to speak in a slighting way of his cousin, Jolly Robin, not only because he was so sprightly and cheerful, but because he always wore a red waistcoat.

The Hermit himself clung to more sober colors. His coat was olive-brown, his tail somewhat paler in hue, and his waistcoat of quite a light shade, spotted with black.

As a rule he had little to say to his neighbors. But soon after Bobby Bobolink came to the swamp to live the Hermit began to talk more freely. He began to make complaints, saying that he had chosen Cedar Swamp as a quiet place to live and it was upsetting to him to have any one as harum-scarum as Bobby Bobolink settle in the neighborhood.

And one day the Hermit even spoke to Bobby Bobolink himself and took him to task, although nobody had introduced Bobby to him. And generally the Hermit wouldn't speak to anybody who hadn't made his acquaintance like that.

"Young man!" said the Hermit solemnly, when he chanced to meet the newcomer near the thicket where the Hermit lived, "I'm going to give you a bit of advice. I'm going to warn you that if you don't behave differently you'll come to some bad end."

Now, Bobby Bobolink supposed that of course the speaker was only joking. He knew that some people could joke when they wore a long face. So he laughed heartily. And thinking what a jolly chap the stranger in the spotted waistcoat was, he began to sing.

"There you go!" the Hermit exclaimed as a look of pain crossed his refined face. "You can't even keep still long enough to hear a little valuable advice. Do stop that annoying noise of yours and listen to what I have to say!"

Bobby Bobolink was so surprised to hear anybody speak in such a way of his singing that he broke right off in the middle of a note, making a squeaky sound that caused the Hermit to shudder.

"Now try to control yourself," said the Hermit. "And if you can only learn to stop making that jingling, jangling music perhaps you'll be able to save yourself from a sad fate."

Bobby Bobolink stared at the Hermit as if he couldn't believe what his own ears told him.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

With great care the Hermit flicked a bit of moss off his waistcoat before answering. And then he said, "Don't you know that some day when you're in the midst of a frenzy of song you're going to explode? And then there'll be nothing left of you except a cloud of feathers!"

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XXI

HOW TO TAKE BAD NEWS

For once Bobby Bobolink's heart seemed to come right up into his mouth. Usually he never let anything dash his high spirits. If matters didn't go exactly as they should with him he would laugh and say that probably they would be different to-morrow. And more likely than not he would burst into the jolliest song he knew. Singing like that always helped him amazingly, when a good many people would have moped and looked glum. But now the gloomy warning of Jolly Robin's mournful cousin, the Hermit Thrush, threw a sudden dread into him.

"Why"—he asked the Hermit in a quavering voice—"why do you think I'm

likely to explode some day when I'm singing?"

"I don't *think* that. I *know* it," the Hermit corrected him. "No bird can crowd one note upon another the way you do without running a terrible risk. If you don't do differently, some fine day your wife is going to miss you. And when the neighbors search for you, and find nothing but a few feathers scattered on the ground, they'll know what has happened to you."

Bobby Bobolink actually began to tremble as the Hermit described the terrible end that awaited him. He was so alarmed that all he could say was, "My goodness!"

"I thought I ought to tell you," the Hermit went on. "I thought maybe you didn't understand. And now that you've a wife and children, too, of course you ought to take care of yourself. You won't want any such accident to happen to you."

"No, indeed!" Bobby Bobolink assured him. "And you must tell me how I can sing fast—as I always do—and yet do it safely."

"Ah!" the Hermit exclaimed. "That can't be done. You must sing more slowly, as I do. Take plenty of time for every note. And above all, don't sing very often!"

"Oh! I never could sing that way!" Bobby Bobolink cried. "I have to sing joyful songs. And you know you always sing that kind in quick time."

"Pardon me!" said the Hermit, who was a most polite person. "I never sing joyful songs. So you see you are mistaken."

"Well, if you sang the sort I do you'd

know that they have to be given in a lively fashion," Bobby told him. "I don't see how it would be possible to make a song sound merry if it had to be sung slowly."

The Hermit pondered over that speech.

"There's only one thing for you to do," he said at last. "You must select only mournful songs.... You know you sing them in slow time."

"Pardon me!" Bobby Bobolink said, for he was determined to be just as polite as the Hermit. "I never sing mournful songs. So you see you are mistaken."

Now, for some reason the Hermit thought that a rude remark, though it was quite like one that he had made himself but a few moments before. He drew himself up stiffly and said that he didn't care to talk with Bobby Bobolink any further. "You know," he added, "we haven't been introduced."

Somehow that amused Bobby. Before he knew what he was doing he had laughed aloud. And the moment he laughed he felt so happy once more that he couldn't help singing. So he started right in the middle of a song, where it was the liveliest. And finding, when he had finished, that he hadn't exploded, but felt better for the

effort, he never paid any more heed to the Hermit's solemn warning.

As for the Hermit, he went straight off to the other side of Cedar Swamp to live. He claimed that he simply had to have quiet. And there was no such thing, with Bobby Bobolink around.

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XXII

A NOISY QUARREL

One odd thing marked Bobby Bobolink's flights. He never flew in a straight course, as old Mr. Crow did, but darted this way and that, crossing and turning and wheeling, until it seemed sometimes—to onlookers—that he was sure to skid into a tree and meet with an accident. And usually Bobby Bobolink would sing with such zest while he was frisking about in the air that it was a marvel to many how he could do two things like that, at the same time, and yet put so much life into each.

Old Mr. Crow claimed that the reason why Bobby Bobolink didn't fly straight was because he had his mind too much on his singing.

"He's nothing but a music-box with wings," Mr. Crow often croaked. "As a flier he couldn't even beat crazy Benjamin Bat."

It was the general opinion that Benjamin Bat could make a longer journey between two points than anybody else in Pleasant Valley. And there were some that disputed Mr. Crow's statement. Jasper Jay even went out of his way to tell Mr. Crow that he had heard of his remark, and that he was mistaken. And they had such a wrangle that they annoyed Mr. Hermit Thrush, way over on the other side of Cedar Swamp. Old Mr. Crow and Jasper Jay were cousins. And everybody knows that there is nothing worse than a cousinly quarrel.

In order to quiet them, the Hermit left his mossy retreat, in a dense thicket, found the two cousins, and asked them, "What are you two quarreling about now?"

Neither Jasper Jay nor Mr. Crow was noted for his gentlemanly manners. They both tried to explain at the same time. And it made the Hermit wince to listen to their

loud, harsh voices. He was himself a quiet bird; his voice was very sweet.

"There's only one way to settle your dispute," the Hermit said when the two cousins had succeeded in making their trouble clear. "You must arrange a race between this Bobolink person and Benjamin Bat."

"Impossible! You don't know what you're talking about!" Jasper Jay and Mr. Crow both cried at the same time.

The Hermit shuddered. He was not accustomed to such language. It hurt his gentle nature to be spoken to like that. But he managed to stay there while the cousins told him that such a race as he had suggested couldn't be arranged, because Benjamin Bat was always asleep in the daytime, and Bobby Bobolink took his rest at night. The two could never meet.

"Perhaps," said the Hermit, "I could persuade Benjamin Bat to change his

habits for once. Maybe he would be willing to stay awake some day, just to oblige me."

"Bobby Bobolink is an obliging fellow," Jasper Jay remarked. "Why don't you ask him to stay awake some night?"

But the Hermit said that that wouldn't suit him at all. "The Bobolink person would be sure to sing his most boisterous song," he said, "and it would wake me up and spoil my night's sleep. Let me speak to Benjamin Bat!" he urged the two cousins.

And in the end they let him have his way.

XXIII

SLEEPY BENJAMIN BAT

Leaving the two noisy cousins, Jasper Jay and old Mr. Crow, Mr. Hermit Thrush hurried back across Cedar Swamp and went straight to an old hemlock tree, where he knew he would find Benjamin Bat asleep.

Hanging by his heels head downward from a limb, Benjamin Bat did not hear the Hermit speak to him until that soft-spoken gentleman had called to him several times.

But at last Benjamin Bat opened his eyes and stared around in a bewildered fashion. It was broad day light. And he couldn't see what had disturbed him. He seemed somewhat alarmed too, until the Hermit said, "Don't be frightened! It's only I!"

Well, Benjamin Bat knew right away that nobody but the Hermit would speak in just that way. And he was much relieved to

know that it wasn't Solomon Owl that had awakened him.

"I'm glad you roused me," he said, "though generally I hate to have my sleep broken. But just now I was having a nightmare. I was dreaming that a monstrous Katydid was chasing me. And if you hadn't called to me I don't know what would have happened.... I think," he added, "I must have dined too heartily—on Katydids—last night."

The Hermit couldn't help looking a bit shocked. He had never approved of Benjamin Bat, who prowled about at night when all respectable people were at home and asleep. And as for over-eating, that was something the Hermit wouldn't think of doing. But if he must choose between Benjamin Bat and Bobby Bobolink for a neighbor, of the two the Hermit preferred Benjamin Bat, because Benjamin was

Mr. Thrush Objects to Bobby's Singing

always asleep in the daytime, while at night he never disturbed the Hermit's rest.

"I've come to ask a favor of you," Mr. Hermit Thrush explained. "Perhaps you don't know there's a noisy nuisance hereabouts who calls himself Bobby Bobolink?"

"I do," Benjamin Bat admitted. "But I've never seen him—nor even heard him."

"Then you are a sound sleeper indeed," the Hermit observed. "He's always a-jingling and a-jangling."

"That sounds as if he might be a bell," Benjamin Bat remarked.

"He's a bird," the Hermit explained. And then he proceeded to tell Benjamin Bat how Mr. Crow and Jasper Jay had quarreled because Mr. Crow said that Bobby Bobolink couldn't beat Benjamin Bat in a race, while Jasper Jay claimed that he could. "What I'd like you to do is to have

a race with Bobby Bobolink to-morrow," the Hermit announced.

But Benjamin Bat shook his head.

"It doesn't interest me," he said. "Let Mr. Crow and Jasper Jay quarrel all they want to!"

And before the Hermit had time to coax him to change his mind, Benjamin Bat fell fast asleep. Nor could the Hermit rouse him again.

THE END

GUNSTON CLASSICS

TUCK-ME-IN TALES

- *The Tale of Jolly Robin* (c. 1917)
- *The Tale of Old Mr. Crow* (c. 1917)
- *The Tale of Solomon Owl* (c. 1917)
- *The Tale of Jasper Jay* (c. 1917)
- *The Tale of Rusty Wren* (c. 1917)
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